



# Demetria Martinez

“

*So many years since that chopstick  
click of yes, so many years I can count them  
in illegal U.S. wars, pueblo feast days  
wicks drowned in red wax. . .*

— Night

”



## Biography

Demetria Martinez has led a life rich in culture and controversy. Raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico, she credits her love for writing as well as her spirituality to her grandmother, a God-fearing, Bible-reading Mexican Protestant. Martinez was a shy, overweight teenager who began keeping a journal when she was fifteen in order to converse with herself.

She graduated from Princeton University in 1982 with a degree in public policy. After four years of college Demetria was clear on only one thing, “Life is too short to work at a job that requires hose, heels, and forty hours a week. Why settle for a career when one might have a calling?”

Martinez went to Albuquerque and joined the Sagrada Art School, a community that encourages artists to stay away from full-time jobs. She lived there for six years whiling away her morning hours reading poetry and her afternoons working at various odd jobs. She gradually began to experiment with her own poetry which was published as *Turning* in 1987.

## Quick Facts

- \* Born in 1960
- \* Mexican-American novelist, poet, and activist
- \* Her first published novel is *Mother Tongue*

This page was researched and submitted by: Eva Chung, Beth Karlgaard, and Quynh Tran on 9/22/98.

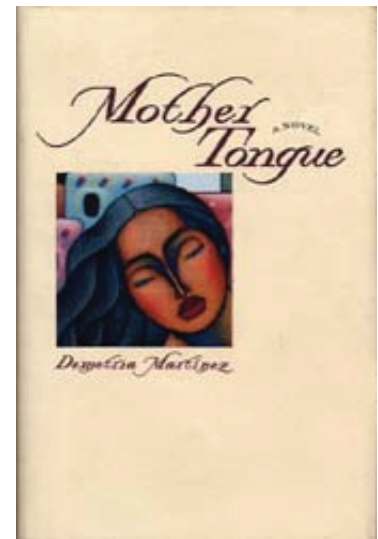


# Demetria Martinez

## Biography continued

One year later she was indicted on charges related to smuggling two refugee women into the country. She was facing a twenty-five year prison sentence and the government attempted to use one of her poems, "Nativity, for Two Salvadoran Women," against her in court. Martinez had simply accompanied a Lutheran minister when he helped two women cross over as part of the Sanctuary movement, which had been approved by the governor of New Mexico.

She was acquitted on First Amendment grounds. In 1990 Martinez joined the staff of the *National Catholic Reporter* in Kansas City writing columns concerning controversial issues such as abortion and immigration. After two years she began to feel stifled by the demands of a full-time job. She attended a Chicano poetry festival at the Mexico Fine Arts Center in Chicago at the invitation of Luis Rodriquez. As she listened to Sandra Cisneros read from *Woman Hollering Creek*, Martinez felt she could hear a voice that said, "His nation chewed him up and spat him out like piñon shell and when he emerged from an airplane one late afternoon I knew I would one day make love with him." It became the opening line to her first novel, *Mother Tongue*, which won the 1994 Western States Award for Fiction. Since the publishing of her novel she has contributed another selection of poetry entitled *Breathing Between the Lines* (1997).





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## Selected Bibliography

### Works by the author

*The Devil's Workshop* (2002).

*Border Wars* (1985).

*Three Times a Woman: Chicana Poetry-Selected poetry*: "Angelo's Story," "Orlando's Story/ The War Persists," "North American Woman's Lament (for Orlando)," "Grand Jury Indicts 16 in Sanctuary Movement," "Nativity for Two Salvadoran Women" (1986-1987).

*Turning* (1987).

*Mother Tongue* (1994).

*Breathing Between the Lines* (1997).

### Works about the author

Martinez, Elizabeth. "Review of *Mother Tongue*, by Demetria Martinez" (*The Progressive*, 1995).